

IF ONLY WE WERE KIDS

Ever wondered what it takes to effectively help adults learn and translate what they've learned into meaningful behavior? It's been said many times that kids learn quicker and easier than adults and in my experience I've seen that to be true. They are sponges, absorbing everything around them – good or bad! They model and imitate behavior fluidly with little filtering...they haven't developed those yet.

As adults, we develop filters or biases from previous learning and experiences. Anything new we are exposed to actually goes through those filters both on a conscious and unconscious level. Those filters can be both useful and not so useful, depending on the outcomes we desire.

For example, let's say an employee has been working for a company for some time that discourages creative thinking to the point that he/she is penalized when they present an idea. On a subconscious level, the message they are receiving is creative thinking is not useful or it is bad.

This employee now has recently moved into new employment with a progressive, forward thinking company, committed to using the intellectual capital of its employees and encourages creative thinking. How will this new employee behave? Well, I suggest this employee may have some initial struggles allowing himself to be creative. Why? Because he has an internal, subconscious filter that tells him coming up with and offering ideas is bad.

In addition to filters, as we age, unless there is a concerted effort to keep our brains alive and functioning at a decent capacity, (ever heard of the phrase "we only use 10% of our brains?"), our brains go flat...they actually under function. Critical thinking skills go by the wayside, generating ideas become almost nonexistent: in essence developing new neuropathways, which needs to happen to keep our brains vibrant, ceases to occur.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT?

Hopefully, you are already answering this question. If you look at the most common approaches to how employees are trained (if they are at all....believe it or not, there are still some companies that have NOT made the connection between staff training and development and profits), you'll see that in most cases the "throw it up against the wall and see if it sticks approach" is being used. Another way I look at is the "band-aid approach" - we've got a problem, so let's do a training class and that'll fix it!

IF ANYONE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION thinks this way....THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND what it takes for adults to not only learn, but fully integrate new principles of behavior to the point of a NEW BEHAVIOR or habit....or achieve what we call "unconscious competence".

SO WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR AN ADULT TO CHANGE A BEHAVIOR?

There are several different approaches to adult behavior change, both from a conscious level and a subconscious. The purpose of this article is to talk about what can be done beginning at the conscious level.

To go from conscious competence, meaning I have to purposefully think and act out this new behavior I'm trying to create, to I don't have to think about it anymore because its become so automatic, it takes, at it's optimum, the incorporating of the 4 Adult Learning Principles in ALL staff training and development planning!

So....here they are... and as you read through these, apply them to your current staff training experience.

1. REPETITION

An adult needs to hear something 6–8 times to get it...(and you thought that was just your kids!) That's right – there has to be REPETITION OF THE CONCEPTS A MINIMUM of 6–8 times. This helps the concept to be integrated or installed on a subconscious level....so the principle can “come to mind” in situations where it can be applied.

Of course most of you have already experienced this....how many of you as you read the following can actually hear the tunes in your head or see the picture:

--“plop, plop, fizz, fizz – oh what a relief it is....”

--“Where's the beef?”

--“have it your way”

--“I'm loving it”

--“just do it”

I bet you could name the commercial or company those sayings or slogans represent ...why? REPETITION!!!

2. REAL FELT PRESSURE TO CHANGE

The reality is that people are MORE LIKELY to move away from PAIN... FASTER than they will move towards gain. So, in order for people to be motivated to actually learn – that is take on and accept the concept – there has to be a COMPELLING REASON which creates the DESIRE to learn and apply it.

Please know that the level of pressure to change is directly related to the desire or motivation for learning and implementation!!

I remember early on when the Microsoft Office products first came on the market. At that time I was working in accounting. Learning to use a spreadsheet became ESSENTIAL to functioning in my job.

Without it, I virtually couldn't do it and would have more than likely been replaced by someone who could.

Do you think I experienced real felt pressure to change - to learn and implement? ABSOLUTELY!!! AND, I experienced a bonus in adult learning - there was AMPLE opportunity for real-time application and lots of repetition! I learned Microsoft Excel quickly and was grateful that I was able to. I also saw the great value in the use of the tool. I can't imagine working without spreadsheets today!

It's been my experience in training that IF (and that's the key word) people feel that the training and learning is ABSOLUTELY necessary to real situations that have impact...THERE WILL be adequate motivation in place to learn and implement. So the question is...."where's the pressure and how much is there?"

3. REAL-TIME APPLICATION

Once someone learns a principle to apply so a new behavior can be created, there has to be a real situation in which they can apply it to - over and over again - until they understand it, get it, see the value in it's use AND until it becomes automatic.

I once had the opportunity to take a desktop publishing class for a software program called PageMaker. My INTENT was to use it to publish corporate newsletters for a company I was working for. The cost of the all day class at that time was \$500.00 at an off-site location.

It was a great class. The problem? When I got back to work I NEVER TOOK or HAD the opportunity to use what I had learned that day....and guess what happened? Well, you've heard of the phrase "use it or lose it"? Yep, that's exactly when happened!...\$500.00 down the drain!

4. There's got to be a strong W.I.I.F.M.

Ever heard of that acronym? It's everyone's favorite broadcast radio station, "what's in it for me"....or in the lyrics of singing legend James Brown, "THE BIG PAY BACK!" For adults to be truly motivated to learn, the other necessary component that absolutely needs to be present is a strong sense that SOMETHING IS IN IT FOR THEM.....that in fact there will be a BIG PAY OFF! For sure the bigger the payoff – the stronger the motivation to learn and apply.

Go back to my story about learning Excel. What was my payoff? Well, several things as I recall: a sense of competence, more efficiency, ease in accessing needed data....AND ...of course the most significant – with the most sweeping consequence – KEEPING MY JOB...now that's a serious W.I.I.F.M.

WHAT ESSENTIAL CONCLUSIONS CAN WE MAKE?

I'm sure by now, you've drawn some conclusions about your current staff training and development strategy and the principles outlined above. But let's bring it on home:

- ✓ For the HIGHEST return-on-investment in staff training and development there needs to be in place training that includes: repetition (on going and ease of access to the principles and information), appropriate timing of the learning for real-time application, a compelling reason for the training and a strong, obvious payoff for the employee.
- ✓ If you want significant, long term measurable change, a random, one time learning experience is highly ineffective. One "training class" is NOT ADEQUATE for measurably behavior change or for that matter to develop a significantly useful knowledge base.
- ✓ If it can't be applied immediately (or within a reasonable time frame) ...it will probably not be used and/or forgotten.

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WE WOULDN'T PRESENT A DILEMMA WITHOUT OFFERING A SOLUTION

For those of you reading this that are familiar with the Management-in-Minutes™ learning-training resource, I'm sure you see the power and how helpful the service can be for incorporating these principles into meaningful staff training.

For those of you who are not familiar, let me invite you to go to the website: www.management-in-minutes.com and explore, at no cost, this exciting, cutting edge, training tool. It is powerful, easy to use and an effective resource that can compliment any staff training program currently in place, with just about any training budget.

Or, if you'd to talk to someone about how to bring and use this resource with your organization in a customized format, please call 630.926.5323 to set up a brief discussion regarding your thoughts.

To your success!

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